

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5722
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 2646

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, IS
SUBJECT: CURRENT ISRAELI VIEWS ON SOUTH LEBANON

REF: TEL AVIV 2609

SUMMARY: WE BELIEVE ALLON'S RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENT OF
GOI POLICY REGARDING SOUTH LEBANON RESULTS FROM EARLIER
EXPRESSIONS THAT ISRAEL WOULD RATHER SEE THE PALESTINIANS
IN THE SOUTH THAN THE SYRIANS. IT CLEARLY WISHES TO SEE
A CEASE-FIRE REACHED BEFORE A FURTHER DETERIORATION IN
THE SITUATION. END SUMMARY

1. IN A PRE-RECORDED FILM CLIP SHOWN APRIL 12 DURING A
T.V DISCUSSION BY ISRAELI ACADEMICS OF THE LEBANESE
SITUATION, FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON ENDED THE PUBLIC SILENCE
OF TOP-LEVEL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OVER THE RECENT FIGHTING
IN SOUTH LEBANON BY OUTLINING "FOUR NOES" AS THE BASIC
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PRINCIPLES OF GOI POLICY REGARDING THAT AREA (SEE
TEL AVIV 2609). THESE WERE: (1) NO PENETRATION
OF SYRIAN OR PAN-ARAB FORCES SOUTH OF THEIR EXISTING
POSITIONS; (2) NO TERRORIST ACTIVITY AGAINST ISRAEL,
EITHER BY PENETRATION OR BY SHELLING; (3) NO ACTIVITY
AGAINST "FRIENDLY" LEBANESE VILLAGES CLOSE TO ISRAEL'S
BORDER, ESPECIALLY NO MASSACRES; AND (4) NO INTERFERENCE

WITH THE "GOOD FENCE."

2. POINTS (1) AND (4) WERE REITERATIONS OF WELL-KNOWN ISRAELI POSITIONS PUBLICIZED DURING THE "NABITIYA CRISIS" IN JANUARY/FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR. SIMILARLY, THE PRO-VISO IN POINT (2) AGAINST TERRORIST ACTIVITY DATES BACK TO THE SUMMER OF 1976, WHEN ALLON SAID THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT ALLOW A RENEWAL OF TERRORISM AGAINST IT FROM LEBANON; HIS ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATION AT THIS TIME--"TERRORIST ACTIVITY BY SHELLING"-- PUTS ON THE RECORD WHAT HAS BEEN ISRAELI PRACTICE;

3. POINT (3) STATES "ISRAEL WILL NOT ACCEPT OR TOLERATE ACTIVITY AGAINST THE LEBANESE VILLAGES WHICH ARE CLOSE TO ITS BORDER AND CONSIDERED BY IT TO BE FRIENDLY." THIS IS A NEW ISRAELI FORMULATION. IT SEEMS DESIGNED CHIEFLY TO REASSURE THOSE (MAINLY CHRISTIAN) LEBANESE IN THE SOUTH WHO HAVE TAKEN UP ARMS AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT LEAVE THEM DEFENSELESS OR ABANDON THEM. SUCH REASSURANCE WOULD APPEAR TO BE TIMELY, IN VIEW OF THE RECENT DEFEAT THESE "LEBANESE FORCES" RECEIVED AT THE HANDS OF THE PALESTINIANS. THE GOI WOULD, ON THE OTHER HAND, SEEM TO LAY ITSELF OPEN TO CHARGES OF INTERFERING IN THE INTERNAL MATTERS OF ANOTHER COUNTRY BY EXTENDING PUBLICLY ITS PROTECTION TO A GROUP OF LEBANESE CITIZENS.

4. A COMPARISON OF THE PUBLIC ISRAELI REACTIONS
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TO THE "NABITIYA CRISIS" (NUMEROUS PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY RABIN, PERES, ALLON, BY OTHER POLITICAL FIGURES AND MILITARY LEADERS, CABINET STATEMENTS, SOME MILITARY REINFORCEMENTS SENT TOWARD THE NORTH, AND A FLURRY OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY) AND TO THE RECENT FIGHTING IN SOUTH LEBANON BETWEEN "FRIENDLY LEBANESE" AND THE "TERRORISTS" (A REFERENCE BY GENERAL GUR, AND THEN A STATEMENT OF POLICY BY ALLON) HIGHLIGHTS SEVERAL NOTEWORTHY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SITUATIONS. THE NABATIYA CRISIS PRECEDED SECRETARY VANCE'S VISIT TO ISRAEL, AND WAS DEPICTED TO THE USG BY THE GOI AS A TEST OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION'S CREDIBILITY; THE ISRAELIS ALSO PROFESSED TO SEE IT AS PRESENTING A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC DANGER IF SYRIAN FORCES WERE PERMITTED TO REMAIN IN NABATIYA. WHEN THE SYRIANS WERE EVENTUALLY "PERSUADED" TO WITHDRAW, PRIME MINISTER RABIN TOOK THE LIBERTY OF POINTING OUT TO HIS DOMESTIC AUDIENCE (ALREADY WARMING UP TO AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN) THAT THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT ISRAEL HAD SUCCESSFULLY

ACHIEVED THE WITHDRAWAL OF ARAB FORCES IN A NEIGHBORING ARAB COUNTRY. BY CONTRAST, THE RECENT FIGHTING GENERATED LITTLE COMMENT FROM THE GOI LEADERSHIP, IN PART NO DOUBT BECAUSE THE LABOR PARTY WAS EMBROILED IN DOMESTIC CONCERNS, BUT ALSO BECAUSE THE GOI HAD EARLIER (DURING THE NABATIYA CRISIS) PUT ITSELF ON RECORD AS BEING RELUCTANTLY READY TO TOLERATE THE RENEWED PRESENCE OF PALESTINIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON. (THEIR REASONING WAS ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES: WE WILL NOT PERMIT THE SYRIANS TO STAY ON THE PRETEXT THAT THEY WILL KEEP PEACE IN SOUTH LEBANON; IF NECESSARY, WE WILL TAKE CARE OF THE PALESTINIANS OURSELVES.) THIS POINT MAY HELP TO EXPLAIN WHY THE GOI WAS (AND IS) SO STRENOUSLY OPPOSED TO THE PRESENCE OF EVEN A SMALL FORCE OF REGULAR SYRIAN TROOPS AT NABATIYA, BUT IS WILLING TO TOLERATE THE PRESENCE OF LARGER NUMBERS OF PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS, WHETHER

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FATAH OR EVEN SAIQA (WHICH MFA OFFICIALS OCCASIONALLY REMIND US ARE COMMANDED BY SYRIAN OFFICERS, AND HAVE SOME SYRIAN TROOPS IN ITS UNITS). THE GOI APPARENTLY WISHES TO RETAIN ITS ABILITY TO STRIKE IN RETALIATION ACROSS THE BORDER AT THE "TERRORISTS" WITHOUT INCURRING THE OPPROBRIUM OF INTERNATIONAL DISFAVOR. BY CONTRAST, CROSS-BORDER STRIKES AT SYRIAN OR ASF OR OTHER PAN-ARAB TROOPS (FOLDED INTO UN FORCES, FOR EXAMPLE) WOULD BE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO JUSTIFY AND, OF COURSE, WOULD QUITE LIKELY LEAD TO WIDER HOSTILITIES WHOSE INITIATOR WORLD OPINION WOULD BELIEVE TO HAVE BEEN ISRAEL.

5. TWO FINAL POINTS. THE ISRAELI HAVE NO SYMPATHY FOR THE INTER-ARAB DILEMMAS INHERENT IN IMPLEMENTING THE CAIRO ACCORDS--THERE IS NO REASON FOR THEM TO WANT THE PALESTINIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON RATHER THAN IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE THE INSTIGATORS BEHIND THE CHRISTIAN OFFENSIVE THAT TOOK TAIBEH AND SET OFF THE PALESTINIAN REACTION WHICH BROUGHT MAINLINE FATAH TROOPS INTO THE SOUTH IN CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS. THE ISRAELI ARE PROBABLY DISAPPOINTED WITH THE SET-BACK TO CHRISTIAN ATTEMPTS TO EXPAND THAT AREA OF CONTROL ALONG THE BORDER. THEY CERTAINLY CANNOT BE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE NEW COORDINATION THEY SEE BETWEEN FATAH AND THE REJECTIONISTS, AND NO DOUBT HOPE THAT A RETURN TO THE EARLIER STATUS QUO--WITH THE CHRISTIANS PROTECTING THEIR OWN VILLAGES, BUT NOT GOING ON THE OFFENSIVE--WILL HELP TO REWARM INTRA-PALESTINIAN DIFFERENCES.

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